

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

57. (new) A method of retrieving data associated with an item searched for using a distributed computer system, the retrieved data enabling an further action comprising the purchase of the item by a user associated with a permanent user identity, the method comprising:

generating a search request for the item at a user terminal during an initial search session, the search request being associated with said user identity;

modifying the search request to indicate at least one user preference associated with said user identity;

forwarding the search request to a server adapted to retrieve data from the distributed computer system,

retrieving the data from the distributed computer system;

associating the retrieved data with said permanent user identity;

providing a search result comprising said retrieved data associated with said user identity to a user terminal selected in accordance with a predetermined user preference dependent on the extent to which the search result conforms with the search request, wherein said retrieved data comprises an item conforming to the search criteria of the search request, and

performing said further action on said retrieved data in accordance with said at least one said user preference, wherein said further action comprises the purchase of the item at a cost informed by the data retrieved by the search result,

wherein the association of said search result with said permanent user identifier enables said search result data to be retrieved by said user after the initial search session has terminated.

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58. (new) A method as claimed in claim 57, wherein a user preference includes financial information personal to the user and another user preference indicates at least one criteria which a search result must conform which initiates said further action, and said further action comprises the automatic purchase of the item prior to the user being informed of the search result.

59. (new) A method as claimed in claim 57, in which the search result is provided in a medium and format selected by the user for a user terminal to which the search result is to be forwarded.

60. (new) A method as claimed in claim 57, wherein the unique user identity is a session initiation protocol (SIP) user identity and said item is purchased at a time when the user is not in communication with the proxy server.

61. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the data includes an item and associated cost information and the distributed computer system comprises at least one user terminal capable of communicating with a proxy server, the proxy server being capable of communicating with at least one other server capable of retrieving information from the distributed computer system, the user terminal being adapted to be operable by a user who is registered with the proxy server with an identifier for the user, the identifier being associated with one or more static or dynamic addresses, the user identifier being further associated with a set of user preferences, wherein said step of generating a search request at said user terminal comprises:

indicating at least one search criterion to be met by the data to be retrieved; and sending a search request message encapsulating the search request to the proxy server;

wherein said step of modifying the search request incorporates the user preferences and associates the search request message with the identifier of the user;

wherein said step of forwarding the search request comprises:

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forwarding the modified search request message and the identifier from the proxy server to at least one search server arranged to process the received search request message;

wherein said step of retrieving data comprises performing a search according to the encapsulated search request;

wherein said steps of associating the retrieved data and providing a search result comprise sending a search result containing some information dependent on the identifier for the user encapsulated in a search result message to the proxy server; and wherein said step of performing said action further comprises said proxy server performing the steps of:

de-encapsulating the search result message;

processing the search result according to the set of user preferences;

selecting one of said at least one user terminals according to the set of user preferences; and

sending an search result message encapsulating the processed search result to said at least one selected user terminal.

62. (new) A method as claimed in claim 61, further including the step of the proxy server purchasing the item at the cost indicated by the search result and modifying' the search result to indicate the item has been already purchased, if at least one predetermined user preference indicates personal financial information of the user which enables the purchase transaction to be completed by the proxy server, the proxy server being configured to automatically purchase an item at a designated cost if at least one user preference indicates that an automatic purchase can occur if the search result meets at least one predetermined search criterion.

63. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the distributed computer system supports the session initiation protocol (SIP), and wherein the user terminal is a SIP

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registered terminal, the proxy server is a SIP proxy server, and the user is registered at the proxy server with a unique SIP address.

64. (new) A method as claimed in claim 63, wherein the search result message is a SIP message which is sent to the user at an address determined by the SIP proxy server to be the current location of the user who requested the search.

65. (new) A method as claimed in claim 64, wherein the identifier comprises the user's registered SIP identity and the search result SIP message is sent to a plurality of addresses associated with the user's registered SIP identity.

66. (new) A method as claimed in claim 63, wherein the search result SIP message is sent to an address associated with a different user terminal than the user terminal operated by the user to send the search request to the SIP proxy server.

67. (new) A method as claimed in claim 57, wherein the user terminal is a mobile device.

68. (new) A method as claimed in claim 57, wherein the set of user preferences comprises a formatting user preference which indicates how the search result should be formatted.

69. (new) A method as claimed in claim 57, wherein the set of user preferences comprises a plurality of formatting user preferences, each formatting user preference being associated with a type of user terminal.

70. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the method further comprises the step of the proxy server modifying the set of at least one search criterion according to said set of user preferences.

71. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein at least one user preference indicates a scheme to which the user has subscribed which may modify the cost of an item returned by the search.

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72. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the method further comprises the step of the proxy server modifying the search result according to a set of user preferences.

73. (new) A method as claimed in claim 72, wherein the proxy server software modifies the search result by modifying the cost of an item returned according to a pricing scheme to which the user has subscribed.

74. (new) A method as claimed in claim 72, wherein the proxy server software modifies the search result by modifying the cost of an item returned according to a pricing scheme provided by the proxy server software.

75. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the at least one search server to which said search request message is forwarded to by the proxy server is determined by the proxy server in accordance with said set of at least one user preferences.

76. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the proxy server modifies the search result received to identify an address to which the search request can be forwarded to in the form of an electronic email.

77. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the proxy server processes the returned search result to remove at least one result which is indicated by at least one user preference as not relevant to the user's listed interests.

78. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the proxy server processes the returned search result to modify any returned cost value for an item indicated by the search according to a discount scheme to which the identity of the user is associated.

79. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the proxy server processes the search result to prioritise the delivery of at least one item listed by the search result to the user in accordance with the extent to which said at least one item conforms with the set of at least one search criterion.

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80. (new) A method as claimed in claim 79, wherein the proxy server alerts the user to a search result by encapsulating the search result in a small message service SMS message which is sent to the user over a communications network.

81. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the search request is generated by the user terminal modifying a previously stored search request in accordance with an updated set of at least one search criterion.

82. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the set of at least one user preferences specifies a maximum time limit for the search results to be generated.

83. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the distributed computer system is connected over a communications network.

84. (new) A method as claimed in 57, wherein the session during which software provided on the user terminal interfaces with software provided on the proxy server to send the proxy server the search request message is terminated when the proxy server sends the search result message to the user.

85. (new) A user terminal arranged to be operable by a user for use in generating a search request according to the method of claim 57.

86. (new) A proxy server arranged to receive a search request message from a user terminal as claimed in claim 85, the proxy server being arranged to be used in a method of:

generating a search request for the item at a user terminal during an initial search session, the search request being associated with said user identity;

modifying the search request to indicate at least one user preference associated with said user identity;

forwarding the search request to a server adapted to retrieve data from the distributed computer system,

retrieving the data from the distributed computer system;

associating the retrieved data with said permanent user identity;

providing a search result comprising said retrieved data associated with said user identity to a user terminal selected in accordance with a predetermined user preference dependent on the extent to which the search result conforms with the search request, wherein said retrieved data comprises an item conforming to the search criteria of the search request, and

performing said further action on said retrieved data in accordance with said at least one said user preference, wherein said further action comprises the purchase of the item at a cost informed by the data retrieved by the search result,

wherein the association of said search result with said permanent user identifier enables said search result data to be retrieved by said user after the initial search session has terminated.

87. (new) A suite of computer programs arranged to implement a method according to claim 57, the suite of computers being provided on the distributed computer system.

88. (new) A signal carrying a search request generated by a method according to claim 57 over a communications network comprising the distributed computer system.

89. (new) A signal carrying a search result generated by a method according to claim 57 communications network comprising the distributed computer system.

90. (new) A communications network arranged to communicate a signal according to claim 88

91. (new) A method as claimed in claim 57, wherein the method further provides steps enabling the provision of an item at a discounted cost to a user over a communication network comprising a distributed computer system, the method comprising performing a search for the item and associated cost information according to claim 57, wherein the proxy server automatically provides the server software at a

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site indicated in the search result as able to provide the item requested by the search request with information derived from the user's preferences, the information including:

sufficient financial information to enable the user to purchase the item;

sufficient address information to enable the item to be sent to an address designated by the user.

92. (new) A method as claimed in claim 91, wherein the items to be purchased are sent to a postal address.

93. (new) A method as claimed in claim 91, wherein a discount purchase scheme is provided, the method further comprising the step of:

discounting the cost of the item returned by the search by a predetermined amount in accordance with a discount rule determined by the proxy server.

94. (new) A method as claimed in claim 93, wherein, when an item is purchased, a user preference is updated to reflect a predetermined number of points which can be indicated by the user in at least one future search request for an item and associated cost information.

95. (new) A method as claimed in claim 93, wherein, when an item is purchased, a user preference is updated to reflect a predetermined number of points which can be indicated by the user in at least one future search request for an item and associated cost information, wherein the points indicated by the user preference generate a discount in the cost of an item indicated by a search result which at least partially conforms with the future search request.